THE NEW INDIAN EXPRESS

BENGALURU • SATURDAY • JANUARY 17, 2026 • ₹9.00 • PAGES 24 • LATE CITY EDITION

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FTA WITH E.U. WILL BE MOTHER OF ALL DEALS, SAYS PIYUSH GOYAL

Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal on Friday said negotiations with the 27-member European Union are in their last phase

CONCLUSION OF TALKS LIKELY ON JANUARY 27

The conclusion of the talks for the agreement between India and EU is likely to be announced on January 27. India is looking at zero-duty market access for its labour-intensive sectors such as textiles, leather, handlooms, and processed foods. EU is seeking greater access to Indian markets for auto exports, wines, and hi-tech manufacturing sectors | P15

INDIA GETTING A SUPER DEAL, SAYS MINISTER

- European Council president Antonio Luis Santos da Costa and European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen will be on a state visit from Jan 25-27. They are chief guests at the 77th Republic Day
- Goyal said India is getting a super deal, and is giving EU a great deal too. "The good part is that we do not compete with each other."

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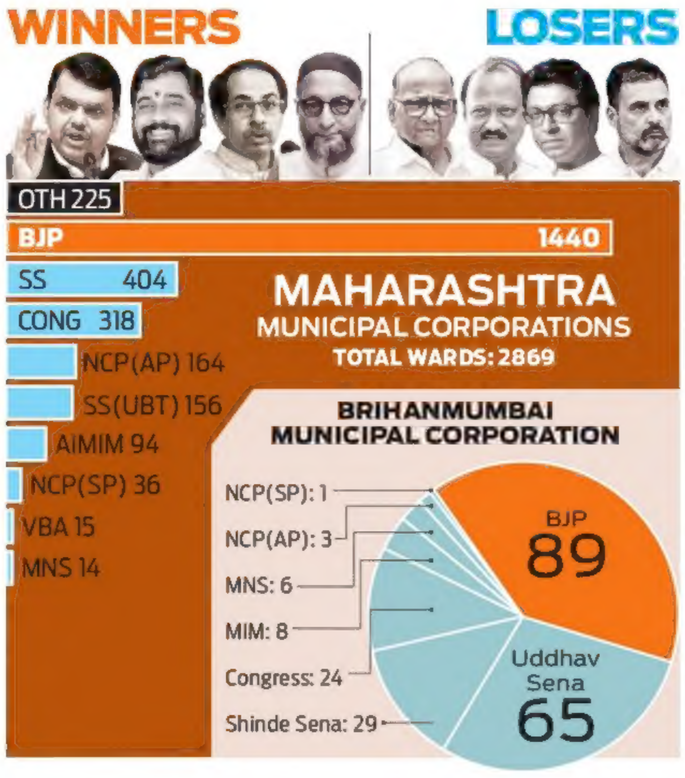
WAS INDIA'S BILATERAL TRADE IN GOODS WITH THE E.U. IN 2024-25

CHENNAI ▪ MADURAI ▪ VIJAYAWADA ▪ BENGALURU ▪ KOCHI ▪ HYDERABAD ▪ VISAKHAPATNAM ▪ COIMBATORE ▪ KOZHIKODE ▪ THIRUVANANTHAPURAM ▪ BELAGAVI ▪ BHUBANESWAR ▪ SHIVAMOGGA ▪ MANGALURU ▪ TIRUPATI ▪ TIRUCHY ▪ TIRUNELVELI ▪ SAMBALPUR ▪ HUBBALLI ▪ DHARMAPURI ▪ KOTTAYAM ▪ KANNUR ▪ VILLUPURAM ▪ KOLLAM ▪ TADEPALLIGUDEM ▪ NAGAPATTINAM ▪ THRISSUR ▪ KALABURAGI

Captures BMC and most of the 28 other municipal corporations that went to polls

BJP-led alliance wrests country's richest civic body



SUDHIR SURYAWANSHI @ Mumbai

THE BJP and Eknath Shinde's Shiv Sena together breached the Thackeray citadel in Asia's richest civic body, the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC), by winning 116 of the 227 seats that were up for grabs, narrowly going past the halfway mark of 114.

For the first time after 25 years, the BMC could have a non-Shiv Sainik as mayor. However, the narrow majority could prod Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde's Sena to lay claim to the post. In 2022, he became the surprise chief minister after toppling the Uddhav Thackeray-led government.

"I am extremely grateful to my sisters and brothers of Mumbai for blessing the NDA," Prime Minister Narendra Modi said in a post on X. "Mumbai is the pride of our nation. It is the city of aspiration. It is a city that drives our growth," he said.

In the BMC elections, the BJP won 89 seats against the previous tally of 82, while Uddhav's Sena won 65 seats against the 84 his party won in 2017. The Shinde-led Sena bagged 29 seats, while Raj Thackeray's MNS performed poorly with just six, and Congress slid to 24. Ajit Pawar's NCP and NCP (Sharad Pawar) won three and one seats, respectively.

Of the total 29 civic body elections, the BJP managed to win over 20, which include Mumbai, Navi Mumbai, Jalgaon, Dhule, Sangali-Miraj, Jalna, Ulhas Nagar, Akola, Vasai Virar, Amaravati, Sambhaji Nagar, Nanded, Panvel and Kalyan Dombivali, while the Congress managed to win Latur, Parbhani, Chandrapur, Bhiwandi and Kolhapur. The Shinde Sena held Thane, and the Ajit Pawar-led the NCP secured a win in the Ahilyanagar Municipal Corporation election. The AIMIM won in the Malegaon civic body against the Shiv Sena.

The victory of the BJP in most of the civic bodies is a stamp on the leadership of incumbent Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis. He steered the BJP to emerge as the single largest party by leading/winning as many as 1,440 corporators in the 29 civic bodies while the Shinde Sena secured 404, Congress 318, Uddhav Sena 156 seats, Ajit Pawar-led NCP 164 and Sharad Pawar-led NCP SP 36.

The outcome could embolden the BJP to go it alone in the 2029 assembly elections. As for the Opposition, it needs to introspect how to fight against the BJP effectively. Lazy armchair approach will not work against a party that does 24/7 politics with a mega poll machinery.

Padi pooja in corruption spotlight at Sabarimala

SHAN A S @ T'Puram

AMID the Sabarimala gold theft case sending shockwaves across Kerala, the Vigilance and Anti-Corruption Bureau's (VACB) intelligence wing has warned of entrenched corruption and irregularities at the famous hill shrine, notably in the allotment of the prized *padi pooja* offering. In a 'source report', the intelligence wing calls for a sustained and precise action to root out the malpractices at Sabarimala, carried out with the active connivance of the Travancore Devaswom Board (TDB) staff and their agents.

EXPRESSCLUSIVE

The report, accessed by this newspaper, notes that 18 types of poojas and 39 kinds of offerings are performed at the shrine, with malpractices detected in the manner the TDB staff intervened in several rituals for monetary gain. As for *padi pooja*, the bookings are full till 2041. The intelligence report flags that most of these slots were cornered by TDB staff and their benamis, and later resold to devotees at steep premiums.

While the official rate of *padi pooja* is ₹1.37 lakh, benamis charge devotees up to 10 times that amount. To conceal the fraud, the names of the actual devotees who paid for the ritual were not recorded by the devaswom board.Also, many of those who booked *padi pooja* in the past five years did not perform the ritual, with the slots instead being auctioned to higher bidders. Similar irregularities were flagged in rituals like *thanka anki charthu* (booking full till 2035), *ashtabhishekam* (booking full till 2035), *sahasrakalasham* (booking full till 2030), *udaysthamana pooja, pushpabhishekam* and *kalasabhishekam*.

The report also flags large-scale irregularities in the allotment of rooms at Sannidhanam. Devaswom guards and security personnel have also been named for accepting financial favours from affluent devotees in return for facilitating VIP-style darshan. It makes damning observations against TDB staff, accusing them of acting as agents for travel operators by arranging premium accommodation, expedited darshan, and pooja slots in exchange for extra cash. The source report calls for a detailed probe into temporary appointments at the Sabarimala, pointing out that many individuals have been repeatedly engaged on a temporary basis over the past decade.

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EXPRESS READ

Bhimanna Khandre passes away at 103

BENGALURU: Veteran Congress leader and former president of the Veerashaiva Lingayat Mahasabha Bhimanna Khandre (103) passed away on Friday night at Bhalki in Bidar. He is survived by two sons — Forest Minister Eshwar B Khandre and Bidar DCC Bank president Amar Kumar Khandre — and four daughters | P4

Siddu hints next budget will be tight

TUMAKURU: Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Friday gave an indication that his budget for 2026-27 would be tight, as he promised ₹6 crore to develop sports facilities in Tumakuru, against ₹25 crore demanded by Home Minister Dr G Parameshwara | P4

RCB proposes AI cams for better crowd control

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Bengaluru

EVEN as the suspense over M Chinnaswamy Stadium hosting this year's IPL matches continues, Royal Challengers Bengaluru (RCB) has proposed to install 300-350 AI-powered cameras at the stadium to ensure improved crowd management. In a communication to Karnataka State Cricket Association (KSCA), RCB said the advanced surveillance technology will empower the association and law enforcement agencies to efficiently manage crowd, ensure disciplined queueing, and monitor unauthorised access through real-time tracking of entries and exits.

KSCA said RCB will bear the entire cost, which is estimated to be around ₹4.5cr. The club has partnered with Gurugram-based tech firm Staqu.

With advanced analysis of video, audio and text data, the system will enhance investigation and enable accurate decision-making. The real-time AI video analytics capability is said to allow for early detection of incidents such as violence, unauthorised access and intrusion.

DOMICILE RULE

Planning a BDA flat? Residency norm may be cut to 2 years

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ Bengaluru

THE Bangalore Development Authority (BDA) is planning to relax domicile norms for the allotment of its houses and flats by reducing the mandatory requirement of residency in Bengaluru from 10 years to just two. The move is aimed at clearing the inventory of unsold properties.

A BDA official said a proposal to reduce the domicile criterion is under active discussion, but is not a government order yet. The move is intended to widen the pool of eligible applicants, official added. The change proposes that applicants will only need to prove 2 years of resi- dence in Bengaluru, along with a valid city address and Aadhaar card. The move will apply to both Karnataka residents and applicants from other states.

BDA maintains it currently has no pending applications for houses and all earlier applications have been processed.

The move drew criticism from some residents, who argued that easing domicile norms could put long-term Bengalureans at a disadvantage and favour "outsiders". BDA countered, saying it is driven by practical considerations as it is essential to boost sales and support urban development.

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Government of Karnataka
Medical Education Department
A Historic event of Sigining of MoU between Department of Medical Education, and Azim Premji Foundation for construction and maintenance of 1000 bedded Super Specialty and Human Multi-organ Transplant Hospital.
17-01-2026, Saturday 11.00 A.M
Banquet Hall, Vidhana Soudha, Bengaluru.
Inauguration :
Sri. Siddaramaiah
Hon'ble Chief Minister, Government of Karnataka,
Hon'ble Invitees:
Smt. Nirmala Seetharaman,
Hon'ble Central Minister for Finance and Corporate Affairs Government of India.
Sri. D.K Shivakumar,
Hon'ble Deputy Chief Minister, Government of Karnataka
Kum. Shobha Karandlaje,
Sri. Basavaraja S Horatti,
Hon'ble chairman of Karnataka Legislative Council
Sri. U.T. Khadar
Hon'bleSpeaker of Karnataka Legislative Assembly
Chairmanship
Dr. Sharanaprakash R Patil
Honble minister for Medical Education and Minister for Skill Development Entrepreneurship and Livelihood, Government of Karnataka.
Special Invitees :
Sri. Azim Premji
Chairman
Wipro company and Azim Premji Foundation
Honorary Presence :
Dr. Shalini Rajaneesh IAS
Chief Secretary, Government of Karnataka
All Hon'ble Ministers, Members of Parliament, Members of Legislative Assembly and Council,
Welcomed by
Sri Mohammad Mohsin, IAS
Additional Chief Secretary to Government Medical Education Department
Dr. B L Sujatha Rathod
Director of Medical Education, Medical Education Department
Dr. Nagesh. N.S
Director, Institute of Gastroenterology Sciences and Organ Transplant, Bengaluru.
A Warm Welcome to All